

ALTESS is streamlining and consolidating these individual help desks into one Customer Support Center. All inquiries and support requests will route to one location — the PM ALTESS Customer Support Center at **CustomerSupportCenter@altess.army.mil**, 1-800-981-3234, or <https://portal.altess.army.mil>. The PM ALTESS Customer Support Center will be your one-stop shop for assistance.

What You Can Expect

The PM ALTESS Customer Support Center will be able to process your requests with an immediate answer or promptly elevate it to our expert teams, as well as track requests from start to finish, obtain Web-based status reports and provide an improved Frequently Asked Questions database — all with a personal touch.

What's the bottom line for you, the customer? Timely, accurate and comprehensive answers so you can continue with your critical mission.

Joseph G. Plott is the team leader for the Customer Support Center at PM ALTESS, Radford, VA.

Worth Reading

Not a Good Day to Die

Sean Naylor
Berkley Books, 2005



Reviewed by Scott Curthoys, a retired U.S. Army military intelligence and foreign area officer, who now is a counterintelligence analyst contractor for a federal agency.

Almost like a right of passage, the United States must absorb a bloody nose in the first major battle of every war before sizing up the enemy and going to work.

It was only after battles such as Kasserine Pass in World War II and the forlorn stand by Task Force Smith during the Korean War that our military leadership began to apply to the battlefield what had previously been an academic

consideration of war. This was the case in March 2002 when the United States went into the Shahikot Valley of Afghanistan in the first significant face-to-face combat with the enemy in the global war on terrorism (GWOT).

Operation Anaconda was designed to block the escape routes through the mountains for Taliban and al-Qaeda forces occupying villages in the valley. The idea was to pin the enemy in place so that Afghan forces (with American guidance) could sweep into the valley and secure the villages. As the American forces landed and moved toward their blocking positions, it quickly became evident that the enemy had the key terrain and was not in the valley.

In his book, *Not a Good Day to Die*, Sean Naylor does an exceptional job of alternately chronicling the failure of U.S. leaders to assemble a coherent and properly equipped force with the exceptional bravery and fortitude of individual Soldiers and their units. *Not a Good Day to Die* is not a memoir, told from the point of view of either a general or individual soldier. Nor is it an analytical account written by a professor of history. Instead, Naylor approaches the story as the outstanding journalist he is by observing, recording the first draft of history in a beat-up notebook, interviewing participants and then reporting the facts in a colorful and engaging style.

Naylor admits that this was “not an easy book to report.” It is also not an easy book to read. It requires patience and more than a little understanding of the military and its particular language. Naylor didn’t write the book as much as assemble it — much like a chef assembling a dish, ingredient by ingredient. For some readers, the first part of the book will be tedious as Naylor attempts to set the scene by introducing a large cast of characters.

But like the recipe for a good dish, each ingredient in Naylor’s book has a purpose. Clearly emerging from this “stew” of characters is the realization that there was little unity of command in *Operation Anaconda*. This lack of a unified command structure stemmed from the parallel efforts of conventional troops and special operations forces in the Shahikot Valley. MG Franklin Hagenbeck, Commanding General, 10th Mountain Division (Light), was the nominal commander of all forces involved in *Operation Anaconda* except those from Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). What Hagenbeck led was a force cobbled together from the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and his own 10th Mountain Division. Meanwhile, the JSOC presence included a bewildering array of task forces and teams, including allies, which were connected to Hagenbeck’s effort only through the personal liaison of a few individuals.

The author's descriptions of the operational environment — the steep mountains, rocky terrain and the cold weather — serve to highlight the exceptional efforts made by the special operations reconnaissance teams and the troops that were air-lifted into the valley. Among the several heroes in the book were the special operators that occupied overwatch positions above the valley in the days before *Operation Anaconda*. They were the first to realize that the enemy was not in the valley but was in fact on the high ground surrounding the objectives. It seems, however, that this realization came too late for planners to change the operation — a failure in flexibility.

The plan for *Operation Anaconda* was also based on faulty conclusions regarding the enemy's strength and its will to fight. In fact, as the intelligence and operations staffs wargamed the operation, they assumed that the enemy would flee into the mountains.

In addition to the faulty assumptions concerning the enemy, Naylor clearly articulates other flaws in the plan. Most significant was the lack of a strong fire support element to support Hagenbeck's troops on the ground. In a decision attributed to the highest levels of leadership at U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), ostensibly for political reasons, artillery was not deployed in support of *Operation Anaconda*. Instead, troops on the ground had to rely on Apache helicopters and organic mortars for close air and fire support. While these proved effective, they were simply not enough. However, Naylor's account of the Apache's battle capabilities and the dedication and skill of the mortar troops is inspiring.

In its concept, *Operation Anaconda* was intended as a microcosm of joint operations, a beautiful dance of ground forces, special operators and air power. What the planning process produced was an operation built on a series of compromises that lacked the key elements for success. With the clarity of hindsight, however, the reader can discern why this came about. Higher headquarters, CENTCOM in particular, was becoming preoccupied by the approaching invasion of Iraq.

Having been present at rehearsals for the operation and for some of the actual combat, Naylor's reporting of the battles — written with a journalist's penchant for fact and a storyteller's flair for color — is riveting. His account of the action on Takur Ghar and Hell's Halfpipe will rank among the best combat stories ever written. *Not a Good Day to Die* is a must read for all Soldiers, Marines, Airmen and anyone who wants a glimpse into what the fight will be like in the GWOT.

Contracting Community Highlights



In *Army AL&T Magazine's* "Contracting Community Highlights" section, each feature article is intended to provide in-depth information relative to a contracting organization, mission or process. This issue's feature article, "Donation Drive for Hurricane Katrina Victims," highlights the humanitarian efforts of the Army Contracting Agency-Information Technology, E-Commerce and Commercial Contracting Center (ITEC4), in spearheading a donation drive to assist evacuated residents of the Gulfport, MS, Armed Forces Retirement Home. A supplemental article from ITEC4 provides descriptions of multiple contracts awarded in support of Hurricane Katrina rescue and relief efforts.

In addition to the feature, we provide news from a number of our contracting organizations, including success stories and awards provided to individuals for exemplary work performance and various contracting achievements. This issue, our regular "DAR Council Corner" presents a *Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR)* proposed rule to simplify government property regulations.

We appreciate support from the field in providing material for publication, and we hope you find the submissions informative and interesting.

Tina Ballard

Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army
(Policy and Procurement)

Donation Drive for Hurricane Katrina Victims

The Army Contracting Agency-Information Technology, E-Commerce and Commercial Contracting Center (ACA-ITEC4), wanting to help those impacted by Hurricane Katrina, spearheaded a donation drive to assist evacuated residents